DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 660 UD 035 960

AUTHOR	Lonergan, James
TITLE	A Guide to the Testing and Accountability Requirements of No Child Left Behind. For Parents, about Parents.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, New York, NY.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2003-11-00
NOTE	5p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0035
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 West 120th Street, Box 40, New York, NY 10027. Tel: 800-601-4868 (Toll Free); Fax: 212-678-4012; e-mail: eric-cue@columbia.edu; Web site: http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- ERIC Publications (071)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *Accountability; *Educational Legislation; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Federal Legislation; Limited English Speaking; *Quality Control; School Districts; Special Needs Students; State Standards; *Student Evaluation; Teacher Competencies; *Testing
IDENTIFIERS	*No Child Left Behind Act 2001

ABSTRACT

This guide reviews the testing and accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). It discusses: subjects on which students will be tested and when (all states must test math and reading achievement annually in grades 3-8 and at least once during grades 10-12 by 2005-06); whether children with disabilities or limited English proficiency will be tested (NCLB requires testing of all students, and states must provide reasonable accommodation for students with special needs); and how schools will be graded (each district must produce and distribute annual report cards with information on how students performed on state tests in the entire district and each school). Report cards must be made available to parents by the beginning of each school year, though states and districts may publicize the information through other channels. The guide defines adequate yearly progress (a requirement of NCLB that states set minimum levels of student improvement that districts and schools must make within a certain period) and indicates that school report cards must indicate if schools are meeting state standards of adequate yearly progress or are needing improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. The guide explains that local districts are also held accountable for improving teacher quality (each state receiving Title II funds must have a plan guaranteeing that all teachers of core academic subjects are highly qualified by 2005-06). (SM)

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ED 482 660

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education

for parents, about parents **November 2003**

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James Lonergan

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A Guide to the Testing and Accountability Requirements of *No Child Left Behind*

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (*NCLB*) strengthened the federal government's role in kindergarten through 12th grade public education, with the goal of improving the academic achievement of all students, regardless of race, ethnic group, gender or family income. *NCLB* reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA). *NCLB* stresses accountability for results; doing what works based on scientific research; new options for parents; and local control and flexibility. This guide reviews the testing and accountability requirements of *NCLB*.

On what subjects will students be tested and when?

NCLB requires all states to test student achievement in reading and math annually in grades 3 through 8 and at least once during grades 10 through 12 by the 2005-2006 school year. These tests must be aligned with state academic content and achievement standards. Until then, states must test reading and math at least once during grades 3 through 5, 6 through 9, and 10 through 12, as required by the previous law reauthorizing *ESEA*. Beginning in 2007-2008, states must also test science achievement at least once during each of these three grade spans. In addition, states have been required to test the English proficiency of all limited English proficient students since the 2002-2003 school year. States may still require their students to be tested in other subject areas (for example, history and geography), but *NCLB* only requires testing in reading/language arts, math, and science.

Are children with disabilities and/or limited English proficiency required to be tested?

NCLB requires testing of *all* students. States must provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities or limited English proficiency. Accommodations may include native-language tests, but students who have been in U.S. schools for 3 years in a row will be tested in English. Accommodations may vary by state; therefore contact your state education agency for more information.

How will schools be graded?

Each school district is required to produce and distribute annual report cards in a timely manner that include information on how students performed on state tests in the entire district and in each school. Student performance is divided into 3 levels: basic, proficient, and advanced. Report cards must break out student achievement data by student subgroup according to: low-income status; disability status, English language proficiency; migrant status; race; ethnicity; and gender. The report cards must indicate if schools are meeting state standards of "adequate yearly progress" (AYP, see below), and if not, whether schools are identified as needing improvement, corrective action, or restructuring:

Needing Improvement. If a school receiving Title I funds (Title I of ESEA supports programs to improve the academic achievement of children in low-income families) has not made AYP for 2 years in a row, it will be identified by the school district as needing improvement. Plans will be put into place to improve the school, and students must be offered the option of transferring to higher performing schools in the area, including charter schools. If the school does not make AYP for 3 years, supplemental educational services (for example, tutoring or remedial classes) will be available to students from low-income families.

Corrective Actions. If a school receiving Title I funds fails to make AYP for 4 years, the district must take corrective actions to improve the school (for example, replacing staff or instituting a new curriculum), while continuing to offer public school choice and supplemental educational services to students from low-income families.

Restructuring. If a school receiving Title I funds fails to make AYP for 5 years, the school district must restructure the school. School restructuring may involve converting the school to a charter school, replacing most or all of the staff, or takeover of the school by a state or a private company.

States must also produce annual report cards that provide information on student achievement for the state. These report cards are required to include: state testing results by performance level; the percentage of each group of students not tested; graduation rates for secondary school students; AYP performance of school districts; and the professional qualifications of teachers, including the percentage of teachers with only emergency or provisional credentials and the percentage of classes in the state that are not taught by highly qualified teachers.

What is "adequate yearly progress"?

NCLB requires states to set minimum levels of improvement in student performance that school districts and schools must make within a certain period. Each state must establish a baseline for measuring student progress using the higher of either the proficiency level of the state's lowest achieving group or the proficiency level of the students at the lowest-achieving schools in the state. States must then develop annual objectives that show proficiency increases over 12 years, with the first increase required to occur within 2 years, and later increases once every 3 years. At the end of 12 years, all students in the state are expected to achieve at the proficient level on state tests in reading/language arts and math.

How will local school report cards be made available?

Local districts must make school report cards available to parents by the beginning of each school year. States and districts may publicize the information through other public agencies or the media.

In addition, local school districts must notify parents if their child's school has been identified as needing improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. If so, districts must let parents know the options that are available to them. Also, parents of students in Title I

schools are guaranteed annual notification of their "right to know" about teacher qualifications by their school district. Parents may request information about the professional qualifications of their child's teachers, including: whether the teacher is state-certified; whether the teacher is teaching under emergency or other provisional status; and the baccalaureate degree major of the teacher and any other graduate degree major or certification.

How are states and local school districts held accountable for improving teacher quality?

Each state that receives Title II funds (Title II of ESEA supports programs to prepare, train and recruit high quality teachers and principals) must have a plan that guarantees that all teachers of core academic subjects are highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. Core academic subjects include English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history and geography.

In schools that receive Title II funds, information as to whether the school is in compliance with the "highly qualified" teacher requirement will be available for members of the public to see on request. In general, a "highly qualified teacher" has full certification, a bachelor's degree, and demonstrated competence in subject knowledge and teaching.

James Lonergan
Teachers College, Columbia University

This guide is based on *No Child Left Behind: A Parents Guide* (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, available from the Department's web site
in html: http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.html
or pdf: http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf)

For more information on *No Child Left Behind* and the U.S. Department of Education, call 1-800-USA-LEARN, or visit the web sites below:

No Child Left Behind
http://www.nochildleftbehind.gov

U.S. Department of Education
http://www.ed.gov

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
Institute for Urban and Minority Education
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street, Box 40
New York, New York 10027
800/601-4868 FAX: 212/678-4012
Email: eric-cue@columbia.edu

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